

Clarence Long

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COUNTY ASYLUMS

... FOR THE ...

CHRONIC INSANE

In Wisconsin.

A report of a special investigation by direction of Gov.
W. H. Upham, conducted by A. O. Wright.

DEHAVAN, WIS.
PRESS OF WISCONSIN TIMES.
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COUNTY ASYLUMS

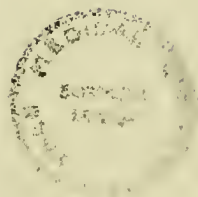
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COUNTY INSANE ASYLUMS.

MADISON, WIS., Oct. 12, 1895.

HON. W. H. UPHAM,

GOVERNOR OF WISCONSIN.

Pursuant to your directions I have investigated the twenty-two county asylums for the chronic insane in the state, and report as follows:

The method of investigation was in every case to take a complete list of the inmates of each asylum, to go over each commitment paper carefully, considering all questions of residence, of idiocy and of peculiarities in the insanity, by a personal examination of such inmates as well as of the papers in the case; then to see every inmate and check off each on the list; and in connection with this work of seeing the inmates to notice all other matters relating to the buildings, furniture, food, clothing, etc. A complete inventory was thus taken of the 2646 chronic insane in these asylums, and it was not possible for any one to be hid away and escape notice. A written statement of this examination was in each case left at the asylum addressed to the superintendent and trustees.

The general result of this investigation is that the treatment of the chronic insane in these county asylums was found to be uniformly of a high character.

The food was everywhere inspected and found to be wholesome and nutritious. Much of it is raised on the large farms connected with the asylums by the labor of the inmates, which greatly reduces the expense of maintenance. Nearly all the insane eat at the table in the common dining room, and are allowed to help themselves.

In one asylum there are too many double beds, and a change to single beds was recommended. In several asylums there are

not enough single rooms for the disturbed and noisy, who are therefore placed in dormitories with quiet patients to their annoyance. In two asylums the dormitories were overcrowded, and a recommendation was made that the numbers in these asylums be reduced.

The clothing was everywhere good, and the furniture could not be much improved, except by a larger number of easy chairs in many asylums, and by pictures on the walls and other ornamentation, which not all the asylums have.

The care of the rooms and the housekeeping generally was excellent. The bath rooms, the water closets and the clothes presses were all in good sanitary condition.

Much care is used in selecting the attendants, the superintendents and matrons realizing very keenly the value of good help. The tendency, however, is to economize by not employing enough attendants. In many cases the rule of the Board that there should be at least one attendant for each twenty-five patients is not quite lived up to. Asylums which have grown considerably beyond one hundred in numbers, still employ only four attendants. The consequence is that attendants are kept at work too constantly night and day. This is an ill-judged economy, and the full quota of attendants ought to be insisted on everywhere. This criticism does not apply to all the asylums, but only to a part of them. In some cases the reason given for having too few attendants was the difficulty of getting good help and that poor attendants are worse than none at all, which is true.

In consultation with the State Board of Control, I recommended everywhere, in writing, a night service for the filthy insane and for those who are sick enough to need night watching. In many asylums the lack of a sufficient number of attendants is shown principally by there being a considerable number of filthy insane who soil or wet their beds nights. Night attendants are needed to get them up at proper times in the night to prevent this. It is extraordinary that this night service was not introduced into the two state hospitals till about a year ago. It is not strange therefore that the county asylums have not hitherto had this night service. This means just one additional female attendant in each asylum, as the male night watch, now employed in all

the asylums to guard against fire, can also act as night attendant for the men. In the Vernon county asylum this night service had already been established. In several other asylums the number of filthy insane had already been reduced to none or to one or two, by sitting up with them occasionally, or by using the night watch for this work, thus having a real night service, though not called by that name.

It was found that for many inmates there were no commitment papers or copies of the same on file. This generally came from the fact that these had not been required in the early days of the county asylums. The superintendents were requested, in writing, to perfect their records and keep legal evidence of the insanity of each inmate on file. They were requested to secure from the two hospitals copies of the medical examinations and commitments, and in a few cases, where it did not appear that there was any legal commitment anywhere, they were advised to have such commitment executed now. The law organizing county asylums forbids any assistance from the state appropriation for persons not legally committed as insane. In a small number of instances it did not appear that inmates were actually insane, although committed as such. These cases were all of persons who ought to be cared for by the public in some way, but who could only be called insane by a very liberal construction of that word. One man was found who was neither insane nor legally committed, and he was informed that he could go at any time, the same statement being also made to the officers of the asylum. In quite a number of cases the medical examination gave facts which seemed to show that persons charged as state-at-large cases were chargeable to some county in the state or to some other state, or that they had been shipped from some European country. These ought to have further investigation.

By the request of the State Board of Control much time was spent in a careful examination of all cases which might be presumed to be congenital idiots, and a selection was made of those who are certainly such, for whom the state appropriation would be refused under a ruling of the Board last year. In deciding on these cases all the evidence attainable was used, the medical examinations when each was committed, the present appearance of

the supposed idiot, knowledge of his early history by anyone connected with the asylum, and presumptions arising from his education and ability to work. Whenever there was any chance for dispute, the grounds of the decision were fully stated, in writing, to the officers of the asylum. It was plain that the superintendents of the two state hospitals had been careless in receiving into the hospitals persons committed as insane who were obviously congenital idiots, notwithstanding the law on that subject. The order of the Board of a year ago requiring congenital idiots to be reported to the Board as such and not charged in the bills against the state, had been only partially complied with, because it was a reversal of the previous policy, and because it was in many cases not easy to decide which were congenital idiots. No doubt a general investigation by a single impartial person on a uniform basis, such as has been made, is the fairest and most satisfactory way of handling this difficult subject. A list of those so selected will be furnished to the Board.

The treatment of these idiots in the county asylums has been so humane and so intelligent as to show what may be done for this not very hopeful class in a special institution arranged for them exclusively.

Quite a number of cases were found of criminal insane, and of dangerous insane. These ought to be in a criminal asylum, and till that much needed institution is erected they ought to be in a separate ward of one of the hospitals.

Also by request of the State Board of Control, the capacities of the asylums were measured up, both their normal and their extraordinary capacity. The increase of insane in the state has been so rapid as to compel the county asylums to be crowded beyond their normal capacity, in the same way that the two state hospitals have also for years until recently been overcrowded. The additional capacity, called extraordinary, is not gained by putting two in a bed, or by placing beds in the halls, but it is gained by using for dormitories rooms originally constructed for hospital rooms or large airy rooms in the third stories or in the attics. There is a large surplus of male insane over female insane in the state at present, and one thing especially attended to was to find room for this surplus if possible. A tabulated statement of the

capacities of the different county asylums will be furnished the State Board of Control, to assist them in making transfers of insane from the state hospitals to the county asylums. In one county asylum it was recommended that additional dining room capacity be provided, and in accordance with that recommendation an addition is now in process of erection. Two asylums only retain the old plan of ward dining rooms imitated from the faulty plan of the state hospitals. These ought to construct common dining rooms, the advantages of which have been shown to be so great in the other asylums and in the Milwaukee hospital.

Incidentally it was noticeable that there has not been attention enough given, in making transfers from the state hospitals of insane belonging to counties which have no county asylums, to placing them in asylums as near their homes as possible. The insane from the same county have also been scattered in several county asylums. It has not always been possible to avoid this, of course; but care should be taken to scatter the chronic insane as little as possible, and to keep them near their homes. Several cases have been brought to my attention where superintendents of hospitals have neglected to notify relatives of expected transfers of chronic insane, thus causing much dissatisfaction. This has even been done in cases where relatives have been paying for their support and have been constantly corresponding with the hospital.

In the course of this investigation every inmate was seen, most of them several times. Not over half a dozen were found in any kind of restraint, or imprisonment, and these cases were fully justifiable. Nearly all the insane were seen at the table, generally at several different meals, the number who have to be fed on the ward being very small, and in several asylums none at all. A very large part of the insane were actually seen at work on the farm or in the kitchen or sewing room, or on the wards. Quite a large number of insane personally conversed with the inspector, in a few cases making complaints, which were usually obviously from insane delusions, but in a small number of cases had some foundation in the little frictions which occur in all families occasionally. No complaint whatever was made of any serious outrage. The general quiet, good order, contentment and usefulness

of the insane when contrasted with the frightful condition of a large number fifteen years ago in poor houses and jails, is the strongest evidence of the value of the county asylum system.

The success of the county asylums is due to the enlightened public sentiment in the counties which has been created since they were established, and to the fact that the trustees and officers are so well fitted for their places. The list of trustees includes many men of state reputation. The visiting physicians are among the best local physicians. The superintendents and matrons are all well qualified for their work, some of them in a pre-eminent degree. Changes are made in superintendents and matrons very rarely, and the tendency is to look for the persons best qualified wherever they can be found without regard to county lines, and the idea is general that good officers should not be allowed to go for any trivial reason. The only place for improvement would seem to be in the character of the attendants. This is equally a problem in the state hospitals, here and in other states. The attendants now employed are as good as can be secured by the present methods and the present rate of pay. They are generally of kindly dispositions and willing to work, even when the work is very trying and disagreeable, as it sometimes is.

What they lack in many cases is special intelligence and special training for this work. This cannot be secured in either the state hospitals or the county asylums without some general system of examination and promotions. The fact that in three cases attendants have risen to be superintendents, and have made good ones, thus giving room for a professional ambition, is a most hopeful feature in this line. The time ought to come very soon when the care of the insane will be a regular profession as much as teaching now is, entrance to which shall be obtained by examination and some professional training, and skill in which shall lead to positions of special honor and remuneration.

Wisconsin may well be proud of her system of care for the chronic insane, the most economical and the most humane in the world.

Respectfully submitted,

A. O. WRIGHT.

CAPACITIES OF ASYLUMS.

COUNTY INSANE ASYLUMS.

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County Asylums.	Normal Capacity.		Extraordinary Capacity.		Present Sept. 30, 1895.	
	Male.	Female.	Total.	Male.	Female.	Total.
Brown.	31	31	62	54	54	108
Columbia.	42	42	84	42	54	96
Dane.	60	65	134	91	76	167
Dodge.	50	50	100	62	50	112
Dunn.	50	50	100	60	72	132
Fond du Lac.	48	48	96	82	48	130
Grant.	50	41	100	59	53	112
Green.	44	52	96	74	52	126
Iowa.	54	54	108	70	54	124
Jefferson.	50	37	87	82	40	122
LaCrosse.	56	56	112	70	70	140
Manitowoc.	49	45	94	111	45	156
Marathon.	70	70	140	93	70	163
Milwaukee.	60	60	120	75	75	150
Outagamie.	52	52	104	64	64	128
Racine.	46	46	92	76	76	152
Rock.	86	66	152	106	74	180
Sauk.	50	50	100	50	50	100
Sheboygan.	52	52	104	68	68	136
Vernon.	54	54	108	66	66	132
Walworth.	44	44	88	52	52	104
Winnebago.	90	90	180	140	90	230
	1206	1155	2361	1647	1353	3000
				1443	1203	2646

An asylum in Chippewa county is nearly completed. The total number of insane in all the hospitals and asylums Sept. 30, 1895, was 2247 men and 1800 women, a total of 4047.

